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ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that people are often so anxious about performing in public that they cannot recall what happened when they were next-in-line to perform. In the current research, 96 general psychology students at Texas Christian University, in four experimental groups of 24 subjects each, took turns reading words aloud. Later, they tried to recall the words, and then completed a social anxiety scale. Results showed that high-anxiety subjects could not recall the words read when they were next-in-line to perform, while low-anxiety subjects could. These results suggest that pre-performance anxiety impedes the encoding of on-going events. (Author/TE)

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The Next-In-Line Effect And Social Anxiety.

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Running Head: The Next-In-Line Effect

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Abstract

Previous research has found that people cannot recall what happened when they were next-in-line to perform. In the current research, subjects took turns reading words aloud. Later, they tried to recall the words, then completed a social anxiety scale. Results showed that high anxiety subjects could not recall what happened when they were next-in-line to perform. Low anxiety subjects could. Results suggest that pre-performance anxiety impedes the encoding of on-going events.

The Next-In-Line Effect And Social Anxiety

People are often anxious about performing in public. Later, they cannot remember what happened when they were next-in-line to perform (Brenner, 1973).

Two explanations have been offered for the next-in-line memory deficit. First, people may worry about an upcoming performance, and anxiety may disrupt memory for ongoing events. Second, people may rehearse an upcoming performance, and pre-performance memory deficits may reflect a purely cognitive distraction (Walker & Orr, 1976).

The Current Research

In the current experiment, we test for a relationship between social anxiety and next-in-line memory deficits, using an individual difference approach.

We hypothesize that subjects who are high in social anxiety should suffer stronger memory deficits than those who are low in social anxiety .

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 96 general psychology students at Texas Christian University. Twenty four subjects participated at each of four experimental sessions.

Materials

For a memory task, 112 common American English words were

randomly divided into 4 lists of 28 words each.

Twenty-four desks were arranged in a circle around the periphery of a classroom. Each desk was numbered, and on the desk a stack of index cards. One of the 112 words had been typed on the face-down side of each card.

Procedure

Twenty-four subjects arrived at the classroom and were seated in the 24 numbered desks. The subjects participated in four memory trials. At each trial, half of the subjects were called upon (by number) to Read words aloud before the group; the other subjects merely listened. The Readers were called upon in a consecutive order so that they could anticipate when they would be required to Read. At each trial, subjects heard 28 words read aloud, then tried to remember the words. On a blank sheet of paper, subjects jotted as many of the words as they could recall.

After Trial 4, subjects completed the Social Anxiety Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975).

Results

To assess the next-in-line effect, we analyzed subjects' memory for words as a function of the word's position relative to the subject's reading performance (cf. Bond, 1985). We distinguished subjects who scored above the median in social anxiety from those who scored at or below the median.

The next-in-line effect depends on social anxiety. Subjects

who are high in social anxiety suffer a clear pre-performance deficit (see Figure 1). High anxiety readers remember only 10.6% of the words at position -1, and they remember 25.7% of words at positions -6 through -2; for the comparison, F (1,46) = 11.90, p. < .001.

Low Anxiety readers showed no performance memory deficit. Low anxiety readers recalled nearly as many of the words at position -1 as at positions -2 through -6, M correct recall = 23.3% vs. 26.5%, respectively, F(1,48) = .46, n.s (see Figure 2).

Discussion

Social anxiety is related to the next-in-line effect. High anxiety subjects suffer pre-performance memory deficits, low anxiety subjects do not.

The next-in-line effect is not related to all forms of anxiety. It depends on anxiety about public performance, rather than fear of negative evaluation.

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Figure 1

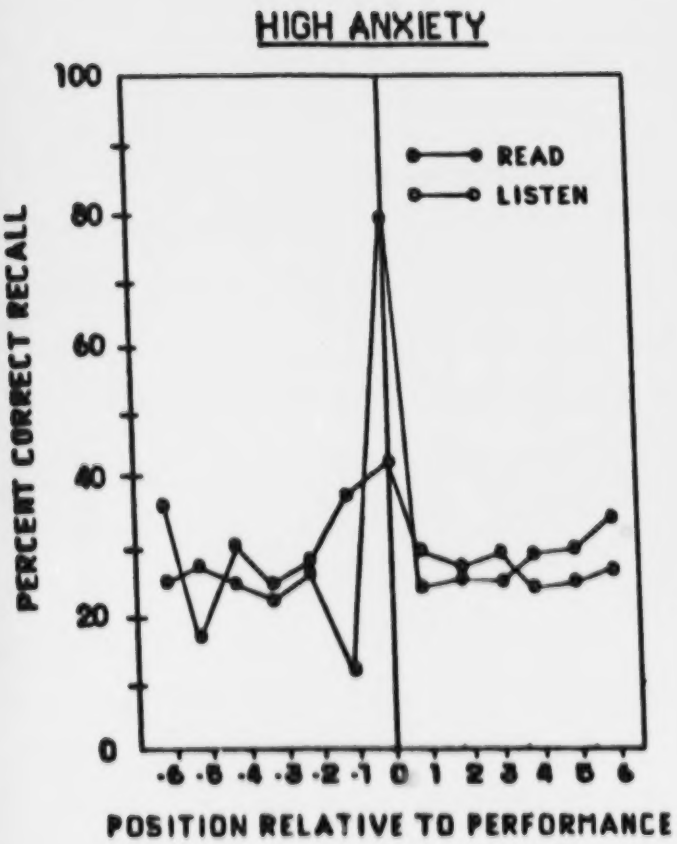

Figure 2